

WORKSHOP SUMMARY

Title of Event: Rural Peer Support Workshop
Developing Rural Partnerships: Making Welfare Reform Work in Rural Communities

Date: September 16-17, 1999

Location: Saint Paul, Minnesota

I. Introduction

The Welfare Peer Technical Assistance Network, funded by the Administration for Children and Families, Office of Family Assistance, held a 1 and a 1/2 day interactive workshop addressing the issue of welfare reform in the rural community context. The focus of the workshop was to promote the sharing of ideas and innovative practices designed to assist rural communities to effectively collaborate and utilize community resources to move welfare recipients to employment and self-sufficiency.

Representatives from State and local TANF Departments, Welfare to Work Departments, and Transportation Departments were invited from the following eight states - Colorado, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Minnesota, Nebraska, West Virginia and Wisconsin to participate. See Appendices I and II for copies of the workshop agenda and participant list.

Many of the general issues confronting welfare reform in rural areas are similar to those impediments facing welfare reform in general. Issues about meeting work requirements, finding and retaining a job, and securing adequate, affordable support services (transportation, childcare, housing, health care) are obstacles commonly faced by the vast majority of welfare clients. In rural areas, however, each of these issues is often exacerbated, imposing even greater challenges and the need for unique solutions.

The Rural Policy Research Institute reports that welfare caseloads have declined at a slower rate in rural areas than in urban, suburban or the nation as a whole. Moreover, although caseloads are generally declining in rural areas, the economic status of rural adults has not improved. Unique challenges to responding to welfare reform in rural areas include:¹

¹ Rural Policy Research Institute. February 10, 1999. *Rural America and Welfare Reform: An Overview Assessment*.

- Compared to urban counterparts, most rural communities have higher poverty levels, greater underemployment, lower education levels, lower incomes, and longer distances between home, childcare and work sites
- Rural workers are more likely to earn a minimum wage, and rural families are more likely to be employed and still be poor
- Rural women leaving assistance have lower earnings than their urban counterparts
- Due to lack of program information and stigma related to reliance on public assistance, welfare participation is lower in rural areas
- Licensed childcare providers are less available in rural than in urban areas
- Public transportation is less available in rural areas than in urban areas: 80% of rural counties have no public bus service, compared to only 2% of counties in urban areas
- Specialized services are less available in rural than in urban areas

However, while rural areas are facing extreme challenges in the face of welfare reform, most research and media attention regarding welfare reform discussions and strategies still focus on urban or suburban areas, rather than rural areas.

II. Welcome and Introductions; Workshop Overview

John Horejsi, from the Office of Family Assistance, Administration for Children and Families, opened the workshop by welcoming the workshop participants, providing information about the Welfare Peer Technical Assistance Network, and giving a general overview of the Rural Peer Technical Assistance workshop. The workshop topic areas included developing partnerships, economic development strategies and addressing the barriers of childcare, transportation, and housing in rural areas. Participants were asked to give their views of the primary barriers to implementing welfare reform and assisting families to self-sufficiency in each of their rural communities. The issues of transportation and job creation were the most commonly noted responses. Mary Orr, Acting Assistant Commissioner of the Economic & Community Support Strategies, Minnesota Department of Human Services, also welcomed the group to St. Paul and stressed the need for broader peer exchange and formation of partnerships to successfully move families in rural areas from welfare to work.

III. Welfare Reform in Rural America

Dianne McSwain, representing the Office of Intergovernmental Affairs, Department of Health and Human Services, informed participants about the National Rural Development Partnership (NRDP). The NRDP enables rural institutions to work together more effectively and efficiently by bringing together representatives of over 40 Federal agencies and key national organizations to support the State Rural Development Councils (SRDC) and to provide a rural

voice to the national level regarding federal policy and program development. Similarly, the SRDCs bring key local rural players together to address critical community concerns and to respond to fast-breaking opportunities, leading to greater cooperation and collaboration among rural organizations across program and governmental boundaries. Participants were encouraged to access the NRDP web site located at <http://www.rurdev.usda.gov/nrdp> and to connect with SRDCs in their own state.

April Bender, from the Welfare to Work Technical Assistance Team, Partnerships for Quality, shared information on the research conducted at Partnerships for Quality. Her project found that there are two underlying factors contributing to the gainful employment and success of the participant: (1) attitude / motivation and (2) self-esteem. The factors that appear to have the greatest influence on increasing the motivation and self-esteem of the participant include:

- How agencies identify the needs of the recipient
- How agencies identify the needs of employers
- How agencies respond to those needs in the form of services and delivery strategies

If these factors can be identified and evaluated, the specific type of barrier becomes less important to those agencies possessing the infrastructure necessary to successfully address *any* barrier related to achieving the goals of welfare reform. The common thread of success is ‘to serve individuals one person at a time’. Further information from the NY State Welfare to Work Resource Net can be accessed at <http://www.nyswtwrn.com>.

Participant discussion also centered around the need to be creative, to change the culture of workers and employment service providers, and to do a better job collaborating and getting the right people involved across all sectors.

IV. Building Partnerships in Rural Communities

This session focused on the need to build partnerships and collaborate with stakeholders—including foundations, employers, and faith-based institutions - across the service sectors.

Lewis Hohlfeld, representing the McKnight Foundation, described how the foundation has funded 16 rural partnerships in Minnesota with an underlying strategy to involve the entire community. A multi-sector community collaboration is a “strategic alliance of public, private, and nonprofit sectors, which enhances each others capacity for sharing risks, responsibility, resources and rewards”. McKnight Foundation partners include representatives from

foundations, nonprofits, private sector, employers, faith based organizations, public sector, community leaders, universities, researchers, senior citizens, mentors, and welfare recipients.

Mr. Hohlfeld offered the following thoughts on how to encourage and make collaborative efforts successful:

- Need an independent coordinator who is unaffiliated with the planning group. The coordinator is a gatekeeper and mediator to foster cooperation.
- Work directly with line staff
- Be results oriented; Specify results for the line staff to achieve
- County commissioners are often instrumental in moving public sector towards collaboration and partnerships. Commissioners have the ability to bring additional state resources to the table.
- Offer recognition and rewards; Celebrate victories
- Involve representatives from different counties/locales; Inter-county nature will reduce turf issues
- Multi-sector nature demands a different decision-making model
- Attitude / culture change is necessary

Paul Ramcharit, Management Analyst for the Minnesota Department of Human Services, pointed out that it is imperative to pro-actively engage employers in welfare reform strategies, considering that the key focus of welfare reform policy is to assist TANF participants to find and retain employment. A number of states are already forging new partnerships with employers to address this issue. For example, Florida's local welfare programs are run by boards, which, by law, must consist of a majority of citizens with business and management experience. Arkansas established local coalitions to help engage business leaders in the designing of and contracting for training and employment programs. Finally, McKnight Foundation applicant groups are required to collaborate with employers and businesses as criteria for selection process.

Mr. Ramcharit offered the following incentives to engage employers:

- Tax credits when hiring TANF participants
- Benefits of obtaining qualified employees through job training programs
- Helping employers to see the greater good for their community
- Benefit of mentorship in retaining employees and reducing employee turnover
- Publicity and recognition for contributions to welfare reform

And strategies to engage employers:

- Understanding the needs of employers through surveys and interviews. Use survey results to develop appropriate training and mentoring programs, which fit the needs of employers and potential employees.
- Luncheon and informational sessions for employers. Allows for education and information sharing.
- Production of Employer/Employee Support Handbooks. Provide awareness regarding the available resources in the community, such as transportation, childcare, and training programs.
- Employer recognition and awards for contributions. Provide awards as a symbol of employer's commitment to the community and involve the local media.

Steven Minnema shared how the Mankato Ecumenical Task Force on Welfare Reform received a \$20,000 grant to assess the service capacity of faith based organizations. Through interviews with individuals who turned to churches for their emergency needs, the task force found that faith based centers have 'scattered outbreaks of compassion' but do not have systemic, coordinated nor sustainable systems to address emergency needs. In response, the Task Force has developed a program to assist welfare recipients move to self-sufficiency.

The centerpiece of the Task Force's program is the establishment of a mentoring program at two sites. Volunteers from the congregation have been recruited and trained on how to mentor and support individuals and families seeking to transition off of welfare to self-sufficiency. Issues addressed by mentors include training, budgeting, and support skills. Furthermore, through a McKnight Foundation grant, the Task Force contracts with 16 local garages for low cost auto repair. The Task Force is also involved in the provision of prescription drug samples for those who can not afford them.

Steven Minnema offered a number of important lessons regarding faith-based involvement in welfare reform:

- Getting churches and the faith-based community involved is NOT an easy matter. The church is a class and tradition bound institution. It is, however, definitely worth the effort.
- There are incredible resources in the church – i.e., the congregation and volunteers who have a moral and spiritual obligation to helping one's neighbor.
- A coordinator with great organizational skills is necessary.
- Partnering is necessary.
- Churches and faith-based organizations must believe that their work falls within the central tenants of their religion, but also must agree not to proselytize or coerce others to their faith.

V. Economic and Community Development Strategies for Rural America

Finding an adequately paying job in rural areas is often extremely difficult. Compared with urban and suburban locales, rural areas often have limited employment opportunities, lower wages and fewer job-training opportunities. Rural workers are more likely to be underemployed and less likely to be able to improve their employment circumstances over time. Furthermore, rural areas are often the hardest hit in times of economic recession. For these reasons, economic and community development strategies specific to rural areas is imperative. The following presentations provided information on how rural communities can improve their economic situation.

Kevin Shipley, Vice President of Business Development for the Midwest Minnesota Community Development Corporation (MMCDC) discussed the role of CDCs in rebuilding and investing in low-income communities. MMCDC is a nonprofit, low-income community organization that helps to rebuild distressed rural communities through capital investment and lending, creation of jobs, development of housing, and technical assistance efforts. MMCDC's primary strategy is to invest in a wealth of producing activities that also create employment opportunities. Under this strategy, MMCDC has financed 232 homes and created over 745 jobs through 11 projects.

In response to the need for higher skilled workers demanded by technology driven companies, MMCDC also helped develop a training company, TeamWorks. Kathy Carney, CEO of TeamWorks presented information on the training company. TeamWorks provides short-term intensive training in the manufacturing industries. The focus on the manufacturing industry was selected since it is a growth industry with highly technical skills, competitive wages, good benefits, retirement benefits, and career mobility. The mission of TeamWorks is to create wealth for businesses and individuals through asset development. In this context, assets equal human capital for the business and intellectual and personal development for the individuals. The company has on-sight recruitment and assessment at MN workforce centers. They have discovered that training is most successful using the following strategies: small groups, applied learning, hearing and seeing, mentoring, integration of curriculum, and multiple stimuli. At the end of the program, trainees are guaranteed placement in good paying jobs at area manufacturing plants.

Jeffrey Joseph presented information on the Community Learning Information Network (CLIN), a nonprofit organization dedicated to empowering communities. The mission of this public-private partnership is to create a community linked learning and information system that will provide all people with equal access to the education, training, and information required for life-long learning, developing new skills, and creating innovative products. Through the

Distributive Training Technology Project, CLIN is hoping to share the education, training, and information resources in partnership with the National Guard in order to train the workforce, provide education and promote economic development for the entire community.

The Distributive Training Technology Project has been piloted at 9 sites in 4 states. This project establishes and links state of the art community learning and information centers. The CLIN learning and information sites are primarily set up at public schools as well as at community colleges/universities, hospitals, nonprofit community centers, business development centers, National Guard armories, and/or housing projects. Currently, two new CLIN sites are being established every week. As more sites are established, this project aims to empower local communities to compete globally, create new jobs, stimulate technological innovation, provide a tool for restructuring education and training, and provide the ability to individualize instruction for all learners from pre-schoolers through senior citizens.

Christine Pigsley shared information on how the Institute for Social and Economic Development (ISED) is providing economic development assistance. ISED is a nonprofit business development organization providing start-up business training, capital access, and basic early support for economically disadvantaged individuals and micro-level businesses in distressed urban and rural areas. ISED uses micro-enterprise as an anti-poverty strategy to build upon the unique ideas and skills of disadvantaged individuals and residents of economically distressed communities, empowering them to create their own economic opportunities and achieve self-sufficiency. ISED provides a comprehensive approach to business start-up, which is structured to maximize successful outcomes. Participants develop a business plan that is realistic and feasible. The training program helps clients develop the personal skills required to be successful business owners and provides follow-up technical assistance to business owners for 5 years after the completion of training or life of the business loan in order to increase the likelihood of business survival and success. In 1997, ISED also expanded services by including a job-search component for clients that elect not to start businesses and redeveloped personal effectiveness components of curriculum. In general, approximately 800 individuals start micro-enterprise training, 180 successfully complete the training, and 75 businesses are started.

VI. Designing Childcare Strategies for Rural Areas

One of the most significant challenges for parents – especially single parents – working outside of the home is obtaining access to affordable, high quality childcare. As work requirements under PRWORA expand, the need for childcare likely will increase. Moreover, child care demands are increasing for: infant care, before and after school care, second and third shift care, care for sick children, and care for special needs children. Rural areas will have a difficult time meeting these demands given the low number of child care providers and trained

childcare professionals. Moreover, both child care supply and wages are low due in part to the high cost of providing such services in areas of low population density.

Carolyn King, Executive Director of Scott County Partnership, explained that the Partnership was created to serve the needs of the entire community, believing that economic development and overall quality of life issues are mutually interdependent. Key factors of the Partnership's success include:

- Recognition that this is a long-term, multifaceted situation and approach
- Strong private sector participation/leadership
- Participation/encouragement from elected officials
- Buy in from educational institutions
- Participation/support from nonprofits
- Ability to share ownership of various programs in community
- Turf issues must be recognized and overcome
- Thinking globally and acting locally
- Looking for outside funding but willingness to underwrite locally
- Results driven
- Celebrating and recognizing successes

Among the Partnership's successes has been the development of a One-Stop Center with an early childhood center, Kids Place. Kids Place is a licensed and accredited center with preschool services, special services unit for children 3-5 w/ developmental delays, before school childcare, and after kindergarten pickup and care. In addition, Kids Place has an Early Intervention program for children under 3 years of age, family support and parenting education classes, and a WIC program. Their largest difficulty has been meeting the needs of second and third shift childcare.

Ms. King also shared innovative ideas about how they have gotten employers involved in childcare issues/solutions. The Scott County Partnership developed a 'tool kit' - *Building a Family Friendly Workplace: An Employer's Tool Kit* – to educate employers on the needs of their employees and to provide them with practical steps/options to move towards being a family friendly workplace.

Fran Lingen, from the Minnesota Department of Human Services, provided the group with information on the Little Angels Care Center, a childcare center co-located in the Guardian Angels Nursing Home. Prior to establishing the on-site childcare center, the nursing home surveyed both the employees of the Guardians Angels Nursing Home, as well as the larger community, to determine the need and demand for childcare services. Since nursing homes are

already licensed for eldercare, the vast majority of childcare licensing issues were already covered. The childcare center serves children of employees first and community second. Currently, the Little Angels Care Center is licensed to serve 31 children ranging from infancy through kindergarten. Having the childcare center located at nursing home has proved beneficial to the parents, the children, the community and the elderly residents. A needed service is being provided to employees and the community as a whole, employee retention has increased, the community has gained a new quality driven childcare center, staff enjoy being so close to their children, and elderly residents love their new life and interaction with children.

Other participating states also shared their childcare strategies:

- Kansas has created a state-federal partnership to fund early childhood development through Early Head Start (EHS). Currently, Kansas has 13 EHS programs serving 26 counties, receiving both State and Federal dollars to provide full-day, full year care to children up to age 3 in families w/ incomes at or below the federal poverty level. Services can be delivered through home visits, center-based childcare, and family child care homes.
- Wisconsin has implemented a seamless child care system to reduce issues/impediments to applying to or participating in a variety of child care programs.
- Iowa is currently using their TANF dollars to study child care strategies

Participants also stressed the importance of assessing the unique needs and desires of the community. Carolyn King gave a telling example of what happens when good intentions are not matched with people's needs and desires. A Scott County firm decided to provide a quality 24-hour childcare center for their employees. Though well-intentioned, the project completely failed since parents did not want to get their children up in the middle of the night to transfer them between the child care center and their home. A similar scenario occurred when Kansas tried to implement 2nd and 3rd shift childcare.

Further discussion centered on the economic difficulties running a profitable childcare business. As one participant stated, "If it was profitable, the private sector would have already picked it up." Discussants questioned the appropriate role of government and the role of the market under increasing childcare demands.

VII. Providing Rural Transportation Alternatives

Transportation has often been cited as one of the primary barriers to moving people from welfare to work. Rural areas, in particular, face many unique challenges in meeting

transportation needs. Distances tend to be greater between home, employment, childcare, and/or training and education classes. Moreover, both ownership of personal transportation and availability of public transportation systems are a rarity for welfare clients living in rural areas.

Examples of TANF and WtW allowable expenses for transportation initiatives include:

- Contracting for shuttles, buses and car pools
- Purchasing vans, shuttles, minibuses
- Purchasing rider slots, passes or vouchers
- Facilitating the donation and repairs of older vehicles
- Providing loans to eligible individuals for lease or purchase of vehicles
- Making one time or short-term payment for repairs / insurance

States must be innovative and look into partnering with other organizations that already have established transportation systems. For instance, many locales – both rural and urban – already have transportation resources for senior citizens, people with disabilities, Head Start programs, and public school systems.

Transportation always comes up as one of the major barriers to self-sufficiency. All services are useless if you can not get to them. Diane McSwain informed the group to contact the National Transit Resource, DHHS and DOT jointly funded project, at 1800-527-8279 to obtain information, resource and funding materials and technical assistance in developing transportation initiatives. Collaboration and partnering with other agencies in your communities is imperative—remove turf issues. She also informed the group that the Coordinating Council on Access and Mobility is currently working on Guidance on Transportation, detailing information on 23 Federal transportation-related programs. Information from the Council can be accessed at www.ccamweb.org.

Brian Solomon, Employment Transportation Coordinator, discussed the transportation strategies of the Wisconsin Department of Workforce Development. With the extreme decline in caseload and the majority (85%) of clients living in Milwaukee, many rural communities in Wisconsin have caseloads of only five or less persons. This makes developing transportation initiatives for the geographically dispersed rural clients an interesting challenge for the State of Wisconsin. In response, the WI Department of Workforce Development and the Department of Transportation have jointly developed a TANF transportation grant program, setting aside \$4 million for the next two years (\$3 mil for past 2 years) for transportation initiatives. The grant program consists of a combination of TANF, DOT, Job Access Reverse Commute (JARC) funds and local dollars for funding. The objective is to encourage local planning and coordination to

develop plans to meet the overall employment transportation needs of region and help people obtain, retain and advance in employment.

The key to success is to get the right people at the table - private sector, employers, DHS, Aging, Head Start/Education, child care, non-profits, faith community, DOT and anyone else who has access to buses, vans or other transport vehicles. Each plan needs a mix of transportation components and strategies since just buying cars is not enough. Furthermore, the group learned to continually reassess plans (at least quarterly) since needs and resources may change.

For Example, in Door and Dane counties, grant dollars have been used to establish an employer sponsored transit route using vans and buses to get employees to industrial parks and also provide childcare transportation. A small fee (\$.50-\$1 per trip) is charged for usage. And in Dunn/Polk counties, grant dollars have been used to implement the Project Jump Start car loan program. Project Jump Start has been very successful in collaborating with car dealers and financial institutions to obtain car loans on new Geo Prisms for welfare clients who meet necessary criteria (i.e., good driving record, make payments on time).

The KS Department of Social and Rehabilitation Services (SRS) has developed a number of transportation initiatives to assist welfare recipients achieve self-sufficiency. Connie Ulmer described three of SRS's transportation initiatives:

- 1) *The Vehicle Purchase Program* – The program has purchased a total of 755 used vehicles, at an average cost of \$1860. Legally, SRS never owns any of the vehicles. The title of the car is in the client's name. There are no payback guidelines under this program. The client must attain certain minimum standards to qualify for vehicle ownership.
- 2) *Department on Aging Transportation Grants* – In 1998, The KS Department on Aging received \$350,000 to provide grant opportunities to Kansas communities interested in taking a cooperative/collaborative approach to improving and increasing services. A cooperative committee consisting of representatives from the Department on Aging, DOT, and SRS/Employment and Adult Medical Services have currently awarded 12 transportation grants from the RFP process. Eight of the twelve grants specifically addressed employment related needs, while also serving the needs of the elderly.
- 3) *ECKAN Donated Cars Program* – On average, one car is donated per month. Donors receive receipt of charitable contribution based on vehicle value. The program also received a grant from Department of Commerce and local United Way to fund needed repairs on donated vehicles. A cooperative agreement has been made with the local high school automotive technology class to perform minor repair work. SRS makes

clients referrals based on a number of minimum criteria, including whether client has a job or good prospects of getting a job. SRS also helps clients with car registration and insurance costs.

Other state transportation initiatives discussed include:

- Colorado had developed a strong partnership with their transit office enabling them to put together and receive 6 of 7 proposals for Job Access (JARC) grants.
- West Virginia is currently working on a lease to purchase programs for current and former TANF recipients. The State intends to award grants (estimated at \$8 million) to regions to acquire vehicles for the leasing program for current and former TANF recipients. Grants will be open to private bidders such as car dealers and rental companies. Recipients will have to attend mandatory orientation classes on budgeting, vehicle maintenance, reporting changes, and individual responsibility. West Virginia hopes that they will be able to serve at least 60% of those in need within the first six months of project implementation.
- West Virginia is working with Regional Transit to add and expand bus routes using TANF dollars. They are also talking about a start-up bus company operation to serve primarily TANF riders.

VIII. Building Connections: Housing and Economic Development in Rural Areas

The link between housing and employment / self-sufficiency has received little attention by policymakers and the media. However, housing is the cornerstone of economic development and self-sufficiency. Without affordable, quality housing, a community's economic development prospects are dim. Communities will find it extremely difficult to retain or attract new residents or businesses to the area. Rural areas face significant challenges in addressing housing and economic development issues. Rural areas have problems with the inadequacy and/or lack of current infrastructure and quality/affordable housing units. Low-income rental housing is much less available in rural areas as compared to urban areas.

Mary Vinopal of Impact Seven (I-7) shared what this community development corporation has accomplished serving low-income northwest Wisconsin counties for the past 30 years. I-7 has developed over \$40 million worth of single and multi-family housing units, with an emphasis on special needs populations such as elderly, handicapped, low-income individuals and families. I-7 and its subsidiaries own nearly 600 units and been involved in rehabbing over 1000 units of low-income housing.

Ms. Vinopal stated that 3 out of every 10 jobs are tied to housing and that for every unit created, one full-time job is created. In short, quality and affordable housing is necessary to sustain area employment. Furthermore, if quality, affordable housing is not available, economic development efforts will be extremely difficult. The primary barriers to housing and economic development for the low-income population in rural areas is that (1) many rural areas do not have a physical infrastructure (i.e., sewer, water, septic systems); and (2) negative attitudes of ‘not in my backyard’ regarding low-income housing and welfare reform in small communities.

Ms. Vinopal also described the successful revitalization efforts in Almena, Wisconsin – a rural farming community of 625 people in need of revitalization. In Almena, the ‘not in my backyard’ resistance was solved by collaborating with the faith community. Moreover, partnering with the faith community has proved beneficial in identifying resident housing issues and barriers. As community buy-in increased, a public/private partnership was developed with the aim of diversifying the local economy, creating new job opportunities and spurring private reinvestment in the community by attracting and coordinating local, state, and federal public development assistance. The group used the funding for marketing, infrastructural improvements, housing development, and financial assistance to businesses interested in locating in community but lacking sufficient equity. The Almena Idea shows that targeted financing and commitment can accomplish a great deal. Over the years, I-7 has helped to develop two industrial parks, complete a zoning project, stimulate the production of market-rate housing, develop low income housing, revitalize and expand educational facilities, and encourage job creation through business development (159 jobs created; 40 jobs retained; 19 new businesses, startups or expansions).

Warren Hanson, President of the Greater Minnesota Housing Fund, discussed the need to convince policy makers, government agencies and foundations that affordable housing is absolutely necessary for workforce and economic development. Mr. Hanson stressed the need to remarket the affordable housing argument from one of equity and social justice to one of economic vitality. Economic vitality is inextricably tied to affordable housing. Given the present economic boom, there is a current window of opportunity to attract more funding for quality, affordable housing.

One strategy for developing affordable, quality housing is Employer Assisted Housing (EAH). Under the current economy, businesses are expanding and looking for people to fill jobs. However, without affordable housing, many businesses cannot easily recruit or retain employees and many communities can not retain existing or recruit new businesses. EAH is any housing program – rental or homeownership – that an employer finances or assists in some way. Employers can participate in EAH through any of the following means: downpayment assistance, mortgage guarantees, rent subsidies, homebuyer and credit counseling, closing cost

assistance, payroll savings match, homebuyer education, post purchase counseling, cash contributions to developments/housing projects, Low Income Housing Tax Credit investment, construction financing, donation of land, loan guarantees, and/or infrastructure development.

Employer based housing is not just for employees, but for the larger community. By providing housing to the larger community, EAH can be a collaborative public/private effort, obtaining both additional public and private funds and support. As quality affordable housing increases, economic development prospects for the community and the job market increase as well.

Benefits for contributing employers include:

- Allows employers to expand operations and recruit new employees
- Increases stability in workforce as turnover decreases
- Improves community relations as employers contribute to affordable housing
- Helps stabilize deteriorating neighborhoods impacting property values and safety of employees
- Reduces absenteeism, tardiness, and stress as commuting time decreases; higher morale/productivity
- Can create a return on employer's investment when structured appropriately through partnerships with developers
- Business contributions to EAH are charitable contributions
- Leverages matching funds from Greater Minnesota Housing Fund through its Employer Assisted Housing Program

The Greater Minnesota Housing Fund has found that locally owned businesses are receptive to participating in EAH programs, however, it is highly unlikely to receive funding or support from non-locally owned businesses.

IX. Conclusion

The Rural Welfare Peer Technical Assistance workshop, *Developing Rural Partnerships: Making Welfare Reform Work in Rural Communities*, proved to be a large success. See Appendix III for further details on participant evaluation and feedback on the workshop. The success of the workshop was due to the workshop participants' strong commitment to addressing the rural context of welfare reform and the highly interactive nature of the workshop. The overarching themes of the workshop included the need to: (1) partner and collaborate with key stakeholders across the sectors; (2) change the culture; (3) be creative with ideas and potential funding streams; and (4) market strategies effectively. As the report details, a number of

innovative strategies and initiatives were shared for building successful partnerships, strengthening economic and community development, designing effective childcare strategies, providing rural transportation alternatives, and building connections for housing and economic development in rural areas. The Welfare Peer Technical Assistance Network will continue in its efforts to highlight the rural side of welfare reform.

APPENDIX I:

AGENDA

AGENDA

Department of Health and Human Services Administration for Children and Families

Developing Rural Partnerships: Making Welfare Reform Work in Rural Communities

Welfare Peer Technical Assistance Network
Embassy Suites
175 East 10th Street
St. Paul, Minnesota
September 16-17, 1999

Thursday, September 16, 1999

9:00 am – 9:30 am

Welcome and Introductions

Workshop Overview

John Horejsi, ACF/OFA

*Mary Orr, Economic & Community Support Strategies, MN
DHS*

9:30 am – 10:30 am

Welfare Reform in Rural America

*Dianne McSwain, Office of Intergovernmental Affairs,
DHHS*

*April Bender, Welfare-to-Work Technical Assistance Team,
Partnerships for Quality*

10:30 am – 10:45 am

Break

10:45 am – 12:00 pm

Building Partnerships in Rural Communities

Moderator: *John Horejsi, ACF/OFA*

Paul Ramcharit, MN DHS

*Steven Minnema, Ecumenical Task Force on Welfare Reform
Lewis Hohlfeld, McKnight Foundation*

12:00 pm – 1:15pm

Lunch (On your own)

1:15 pm – 3:00 pm

Economic and Community Development Strategies for Rural America

Moderator: *Jill Capitani, Caliber Associates*

*Christine Pigsley, Institute for Social and Economic
Development*

Kevin Shipley, Midwest Minnesota Community

Development Corporation; Kathy Carney, Teamworks

Jeffrey Joseph, Community Learning and Information Network

Participating states will be asked to share and discuss their rural economic development strategies.

3:00 pm – 3:15 pm

Break

3:15 pm – 5:00 pm

Designing Childcare Strategies for Rural Areas

Moderator: *April Bender, Welfare-to-Work Technical Assistance Team, Partnerships for Quality*

Fran Lingen, MN DHS

Carolyn King, IN Scott County Partnership

Participating states will be asked to share and discuss their rural child care strategies.

5:00 pm – 5:15 pm

Wrap Up

Friday, September 17, 1999

8:30 am – 10:15 am

Providing Rural Transportation Alternatives

Moderator: *Dianne McSwain, Office of Intergovernmental Affairs, DHHS*

Brian Solomon, WI Department of Workforce Development

Connie Ulmer, KS Department of Social and Rehabilitation Services, Economic & Employment Support Commission

Participating states will be asked to share and discuss their rural transportation strategies.

10:15 am – 10:30 am

Break

10:30 am – 12:00 pm

Building Connections: Housing and Economic Development in Rural Areas

Moderator: *Jill Capitani, Caliber Associates*

Warren Hanson, Greater Minnesota Housing Fund

Mary Vinopal, WI, Impact Seven, Inc.

Participating states will be asked to share and discuss their rural housing strategies.

12:00 pm – 12:30 pm

Workshop Wrap Up and Evaluations

Identification of technical assistance needs.

APPENDIX II:
CONTACT LIST

Contact List

Rural Peer Support Workshop ***Developing Rural Partnerships:*** ***Making Welfare Reform Work in Rural Communities***

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APPENDIX III:
WORKSHOP EVALUATION

Workshop Evaluation

Rural Peer Support Workshop

Developing Rural Partnerships:

Making Welfare Reform Work in Rural Communities

The following averages depict the level of satisfaction expressed by the workshop participants on each of the services provided. Each score was based on a 5-point scale with 1 being the lowest rating (strongly disagree) and 5 being the highest rating (strongly agree). A total of 16 responses were received for each of the questions.

	Mean Score
Peer TA staff adequately prepared your Region/State for the TA event by providing clear written and verbal communication regarding the purpose and expected outcomes.	3.8
Peer TA staff handled the preparation, arrangements, and scheduling of the TA event in a timely, courteous, and competent manner.	4.4
TA providers were knowledgeable about the content of the TA.	4.6
TA providers were knowledgeable about the framework within which the TA will be used, e.g., TANF/welfare reform	4.6
TA providers had adequate background and experience to successfully provide the TA.	4.7
The TA provided was useful to our Region/State in advancing And/or enhancing TANF implementation.	4.4
The expected outcomes of the TA were successfully achieved.	4.3

Describe immediate benefits to your agency that you anticipate as a result of the TA provided

- Good transportation and housing ideas to be used for statewide policy / planning discussions
- Will follow up directly with two of the projects highlighted during workshop for further discussion
- Knowledge of available web site information
- Good presentations / discussions surrounding housing area
- Provided ideas and models to study: collaboration (McKnight Foundation), faith based services (Mankato Ecumenical Task Force), National Guard Technology for Distance Learning, micro-business development, childcare in nursing homes, and using elderly for childcare needs
- Networking
- Good format for sharing with other states
- Strong rural transportation ideas
- Assist in strengthening collaboration with transportation and housing agency
- Contacts for National Guard program
- Building partnerships with employers
- Collaborating and communicating with the faith based community

Describe any anticipated long-term benefits of the TA

- Networking
- Information sharing
- Utilize web sites and contacts
- Exchange of best practices and ideas will aid in development and refinement of programs in own state
- Great materials to share with own staff
- Implementing a CDC on a rural basis
- Learned more about the Welfare Peer Technical Assistance Network and how to access

Identify what was most useful about the TA

- Excellent resources and materials provided
- Contacts
- Sharing of information; Learning from other states
- Housing information
- Specific best practices and discussion about overall strategies
- Small group size is optimal for discussion
- Bringing together small groups of staff at planning and decision-making levels from different states is an excellent process for TA
- Understanding Federal policies
- Information on reporting of non-assistance
- Transportation information and ideas
- Very knowledgeable speakers

How could the TA have better met your needs?

- More time for states to share; more open to dialogue
- Good coverage of primary barriers. Now need to investigate next level (ie., substance abuse, domestic violence, cultural values, self-esteem) that sabotage individual successes
- How to develop local Human Service infrastructure systems to pursue funding and implement plans in rural areas
- Earlier, more detailed information about the content of the workshop; States need more advance notice to arrange out of state travel
- More attention to time management
- Suggestions on dealing with substance abuse issues
- Greater representation from DOL and DOT from the participating states